



# COMMUNITY ACTION FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

A Guide to Helping Your Community Go Green







# Community Action for the Environment:

## An Organizers Manual

### Need help getting your community organized?

The Conservation Council of Ontario has published a guide to community organizing, including setting up a coordinating committee, a community network, an action plan, and ideas for community campaigns and projects.

The guide draws on our experience working with both big and small communities (from Toronto to Elora). It's a low-cost approach to organizing local businesses, agencies, and governments for action on your community's issues!



You can download a [PDF version of the guide](#) or view each of the sections in html format (see below). Use of the guide is free of charge, but we do appreciate credit, and we always welcome a [donation](#).

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## **How well-organized is your community?**

Try the checklist in Section 3, [\*Getting Started\*](#). If you are well organized, see if there are any new ideas that you can use.

With over 700 municipalities (and many other types of "communities") in Ontario, there is no shortage of opportunities to bring people together to volunteer their time on environmental projects. *Community Action Plans* are a simple, low-cost way to organize. They help attract project funding, build community spirit, and find local solutions for a healthier environment.

# 1. Introduction

Canada's environmental movement is changing. We are no longer struggling to make people aware of the issues: acid rain, ozone depletion, global warming, deforestation, toxic chemicals, solid waste, and disappearing natural areas. Canadians share a strong desire to improve the quality of our environment.

Our challenge now is to find ways to facilitate the transition to an environmentally-sound society. Organizing ourselves is the first step.

## **.....WHO ARE YOU?**

Why did you pick up this document? We hope that it's because you want to make a difference in your community. Whether you're a local activist, a politician, a bureaucrat, a teacher, or a citizen with conviction, we can help you develop your community's potential for action.

This manual is designed to help communities organize. In turn, each community can become part of a growing network that are supported through provincial and federal programs, foundations, corporations, and non-governmental organizations.

Community groups and volunteers are an important part of the environmental movement. Through their combined efforts, we can reach and involve every citizen in Canada and encourage them to help improve our environment. Local businesses, schools, and governments also play a vital role in supporting individual and community action. When every part of the community is working towards a common goal, the results can be tremendous.

## **.....HOW TO ORGANIZE A COMMUNITY**

This manual will introduce you to a simple, low-cost approach that will show immediate results. It outlines a five-step process to encourage and support widespread community involvement in solving environmental issues:

1. **Develop a Community Network** -- a contact list of groups and individuals that share a common desire to improve the local environment, including community groups, schools, businesses, service clubs, and the municipal government.
2. **Set up a Coordinating Committee** -- representatives from all sectors of the community who have agreed to help promote and support community-based projects.
3. **Designate a Community Coordinator** -- a staff person, consultant, or volunteer who is the main contact person for members of the community network, and for the provincial and national community support programs.
4. **Draft an Environmental Community Action Plan** -- a brief statement of the environmental priorities for the community, the lead organizations for each issue, and some of the projects that will support the community goals.

5. **Conduct a Community Campaign** -- a number of interrelated projects that support an overall community goal.

The suggestions in this manual can be adapted to reflect your community's existing activities and planning processes. You will also be able to determine your own priorities for action and find out where you can get support for community-based projects.

The more communities that get involved the better. In the end, we will have a network of communities across Canada that are working to improve their local environment. In turn, they will also be contributing to provincial goals as well as Canada's environmental citizenship principles.

### **.....KEEP US INFORMED**

As you read through the manual, ask yourself if you think our suggestions will work in your community. If you decide to organize your community, or if you are already organized, please let us know how you are proceeding. We may be able to help you turn your ideas into action, and your experiences might help other communities.

*Chris Winter*

*Executive Director*

*Conservation Council of Ontario*

*March 1995*



## **2. What is a Community Action Plan?**

### **..... Defining Community Action**

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A Community Action Plan (CAP) is a call to action. As a document, it outlines and publicizes a community's commitment to improving the environment. It lists the projects, both current and desired, that have widespread support and will help address the major concerns of the community, and it provides a framework within which those projects can be undertaken.

As a process, a CAP is more than a document. It is a forum for creating a community network, with the goal of encouraging effective action.

The purpose of an environmental community action plan is to encourage individuals to act for the environment, either by making changes in their own lives, or by participating in community-based projects. To this end, each community action plan has the following objectives:

1. **to improve the local environment** through public action and community projects,
2. **to promote public involvement** in environmental projects and community groups;

3. **to develop partnerships** in support of community projects, involving all levels of government, the business community, funding agencies, schools and universities, and non-government organizations.

Some of the distinguishing characteristics of a Community Action Plan are:

- It is **cooperative**. The CAP brings together community leaders from all sectors to determine where they can work together to achieve community-wide goals. If an issue is too controversial, then it should be referred to a different planning (or lobbying) process. For example, a CAP may not help you to site a landfill, but it will help you promote recycling, composting, and waste reduction initiatives throughout the community.
- It is **efficient**. The CAP process is designed to spend a minimum amount of time on committee work and planning. Depending on the size and existing degree of organization in the community, the Community Action Plan can start producing results in six months.
- It is **effective**. The Community Action Plan provides a concise summary of the major priorities for a community-wide campaign. Whether the reader is a volunteer, community group member, store-owner, teacher, or politician, the plan will show them how they can get involved, who to contact, and how to find support for their own initiatives.

### ..... What if We Already Have a Community Plan?

No problem. Developing a Community Action Plan is not a new idea, nor is it a rigid process that must be followed to the letter. Community planning for the environment already exists in many forms. There are many existing types of action plans, including Healthy Community Plans (combining health, social and economic issues, and the environment), Remedial Action Plans (for water quality), Green Community plans, solid waste management plans, and the municipal Official Plan. Each is designed to involve the public in the planning process.



## 3. Getting Started: A Checklist for Your Community

Before reading this manual, it's a good idea to take a moment to think about your own community, your own strengths, and what "community organization" means to you. Every community is different. These differences will contribute to how you want to organize for community action. Here are some important questions to be answered before you begin.

1. How do you define your community? Is it your town, your neighbourhood, a rural county, or the cottages on a lake?

2. Are there any environmental projects that you already have in mind: cleaning up a lake or a stream, composting and recycling, conserving energy in homes, or planting trees? If so, who should be involved to make the project a community-wide success?
3. Is your community well-organized for environmental action? What are some of the groups and government bodies that you look to for leadership on environmental issues.
4. The most important question of all is: "Are you getting results?"

*Use this checklist to determine how well-organized your community is.*

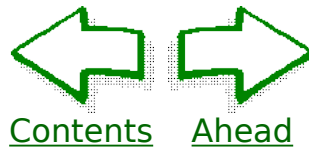
<b>Do you have:</b>	<i>yes</i>	<i>no</i>	<i>Could be improved</i>	<i>Don't know</i>
<b>A Community Network</b> Is there a contact list of groups and individuals that share a common desire to improve the local environment, including community groups, schools, businesses, service clubs, and the municipal government?				
<b>A Coordinating Committee</b> Is there a committee of representatives from all sectors of the community who have agreed to help promote and support community-based projects?  The coordinating committee can be an existing multi-stakeholder committee, such as a Local Round Table, an Environmental Advisory Committee, or the steering committee for a Remedial Action Plan or Healthy Communities project.				
<b>A Community Coordinator</b> Is there a contact person who can support the coordinating committee and the community network and provide a link to the provincial and federal support programs? Usually a paid position, the coordinator could be a municipal staff person, a contract position with a community group, or a consultant. Smaller communities may prefer to work with a volunteer.				
<b>An Environmental Community Action Plan</b> Is there a brief document that states the environmental priorities for the community, the lead organization(s) for each issue, and some of the projects that will support the community goals? It can be a separate publication, or published through a community newspaper.				
<b>Community Campaigns and Projects</b> Has the coordinating committee, or any of the participating organizations used the network to develop a community-wide campaign in support an overall common environmental goal?  Does the coordinating committee encourage and support a wide range of community-based projects?				

### **.....How did you score?**

Relax, very few communities in Canada can answer each question with a resounding "yes". That's why organizing communities for environmental action is so important.



Many communities will have one or more of the pieces, such as an active environmental group, or a passionate community leader. There may well be an environmental advisory committee. Start with what you know and branch out.



## 4. Preparation

### Building Support Within Your Community

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Is your community ready for community-based action? Here are some suggested steps to help you prepare your community for environmental action.

- Identify your community
  - Find out who is interested.
  - Identify or establish a coordinating committee
  - Appoint a community coordinator
  - Identify or establish a community group network.
  - Identify your community needs and resources.
- 

#### Step 1 ..... Identify Your Community

What do you consider to be your "community"? It could be your neighbourhood, town, county, watershed, or even a school or a business. This manual is written primarily for use at the municipal level, but it doesn't take much effort to adapt the process to other types of community. If organizing a municipality seems too big a task, look at your neighbourhood. Are there issues that can be addressed through a concerted community effort? Can you get the support of your neighbours, local stores and your Councillor?

#### Step 2 ..... Find Out Who Is Interested

Anyone can initiate a Community Action Plan. It usually starts with one person who hears about the process and asks "Can it work here?". It could be the mayor, a local activist, a student, or a store owner. The very first step is to take this paper to a few key people in your community and ask if they are interested in working on a Community Action Plan.

Next, make a list of some of the people who could help start a Community Action Plan. Try to include representatives from all areas of the community, including local groups, schools, government, business, and any other major organizations.

Take it one step at a time and build the groundswell of interest and support for the project. Start with the people you know. For example, if you are a community leader -- a politician, or a representative of a community group or the Chamber of Commerce -- you can start by talking to the other members of your group and representatives of some of the other major groups. If you have been approached by members of your community, offer to help them

contact other organizations. Keep it informal. When you are ready, ask for a letter of support from each organization.

### Step 3 ..... Identify or Establish a Coordinating Committee

The role of a coordinating committee is to oversee the preparation, implementation, and monitoring of the Community Action Plan. The committee should include representatives of all sectors of the community, including government, citizens, cultural groups, and business leaders. The committee should ensure that all community groups, although not necessarily represented on the committee, have an opportunity to contribute to the drafting of the plan. The committee should also encourage other groups to submit ongoing or potential projects for inclusion in the CAP.



Does your community already have a multi-sector advisory committee? Many do. A common example at the municipal level is an Environmental Advisory Committee that is responsible for monitoring environmental issues and advising the municipal council. Others municipalities have set up Local Round Tables, adding in the responsibility to prepare a sustainable development strategy for the community. Still others have advisory committees on specific environmental issues, such as water quality (Remedial Action Plans) or waste management (Waste Management Master Plans).

Whether you are looking at an existing committee, or starting from scratch, make sure it has the mandate to:

- consult with the public on environmental priorities
- draft a community action plan
- coordinate and support community-wide campaigns
- assist community groups to develop their projects
- promote widespread public involvement in environmental projects and through individual action
- advise the municipal council, business community, and others on environmental issues.

The committee and the Community Action Plan, should focus on environmental issues, but both also need to address other areas of concern to the community, including health, social issues, culture, arts, and economic concerns. In fact, many activities in the environmental field (cycling, recycling, public awareness, tree-planting, etc.) have positive effects in promoting health, new business opportunities, and community involvement. The coordinating committee should encourage involvement by these other sectors in finding solutions that go beyond simple band-aids for environmental problems.

### Selecting Committee Members

Members of the coordinating committee should be selected for their ability to work with and understand the priorities of each of the community groups. In addition, individuals with particular expertise will prove useful when committees are defining difficult or specific issues in the community.

The qualifications for committee members will vary with the size and type of community. Small municipalities will likely be able to identify the key individuals who are already involved with several community groups and understand the community's priorities. Larger

municipalities will want to include individuals able to incorporate the concerns of single-interest groups into the overall multi-issue plan.

In general, the members of the coordinating committee should:

- have a good understanding of community issues and concerns, and of provincial (or global) environmental priorities
- be positive and constructive in approach, and be able to identify and create opportunities for community involvement
- be able to assist in drafting the community action plan by contacting key organizations and assisting in preparing a concise summary of the proposed activities
- be able to assist in implementing the action plan, through promotional activities, work with local organizations, or other special skills
- be prepared to meet on a regular basis to monitor and revise the plan as required
- be able to provide community leadership.

### **Committee Size**

The coordinating committee should be large enough to adequately represent the community, but small enough to be manageable (somewhere between six and fifteen members). The optimum size of the committee will vary with the size and make-up of each community.

### **Step 4 ..... Appoint a Community Coordinator**

You will soon need a main contact person for the project. In smaller communities, you may be able to get away with a volunteer, perhaps paying an honorarium for their services. Larger communities will almost definitely need a paid position, either part- or full-time.

The responsibilities of the coordinator can include any or all of the following:

- supporting the coordinating committee
- researching and developing the community network
- coordinating public consultation and publicity for the CAP
- drafting the community action plan
- developing a list of resources and support programs within the community and within the public and private sectors
- assisting in the development of projects and community-wide campaigns
- keeping accurate files and records on all aspects of the CA
- maintaining communications with the coordinating committee, with the media, and with the public
- measuring the progress of the CAP against the stated objectives

The different types of coordinator positions that have been tried in our pilot communities include a municipal staff person, a professional consultant, a community group (supported by a foundation grant), and volunteers from the coordinating committee.

We also suggest that the coordinator be the main contact person for any funding or support programs.

### **Step 5 ..... Identify or Establish a Community Group Network**

The coordinator and coordinating committee should develop a comprehensive list of community groups and community leaders. Be sure to include all types of community groups and private partners: environmental, ratepayers, religious, social, cultural, youth and seniors, schools, and service clubs, along with local industries and small businesses. Some potential partners may not be located within the community but will have a valid role (e.g. regional Conservation Authorities or district government agencies). These groups and individuals should be contacted early in process and asked to submit their recommendations for activities to be included in the action plan.

## A Community Network -- Who to Include

*Each of the following list of individuals and groups can play an active role in helping to draft and implement an environmental Community Action Plan.*

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• conservation and environmental groups</li> <li>• cultural groups</li> <li>• service clubs</li> <li>• religious organizations</li> <li>• schools</li> <li>• school environment clubs</li> <li>• individual classes</li> <li>• individual students</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ratepayers groups</li> <li>• local foundations</li> <li>• representatives from other community consultation groups</li> <li>• local MPs or MPPs</li> <li>• prominent citizens</li> <li>• municipal politicians</li> <li>• municipal departments</li> <li>• local government agencies</li> <li>• the Chamber of Commerce, or Board of Trade</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• business associations (especially in larger communities)</li> <li>• major employers</li> <li>• labour unions or councils</li> <li>• individual businesses (e.g. corner store, local factory, video stores, etc.)</li> <li>• professional associations</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

deally, an action plan will draw on the resources in every part of the community. The best plans are ones that develop partnerships between a wide range of groups, using the skills of each to improve the prospects for success.



Larger municipalities may wish to set up two levels of community networks, or identify a lead organization, that will assume the responsibility for involving each of the smaller groups within its network. For example, in Metro Toronto, approximately 100 groups are identified in the Metro-level community network, and over 1,000 groups and individuals in a community contact list.

### Step 6 ..... Identify Your Funding Needs and Resources

You don't need major funding to organize your community. For most communities, the cost can be kept to a minimum by allocating existing staff, public consultation budgets, and community grant programs to the process. Communities with tighter budgets may want to rely more heavily on volunteers and donated services.

Community action is a good investment. It will help the municipality achieve a healthy environment, community spirit, and reduced costs for environmental management. Look first for sponsors within your community. Such sponsorship will help build a strong commitment to the project as well as make it more attractive to outside funders. Try to find one, two, or several lead agencies who will agree to oversee the project and underwrite the cost of preparing, publishing, and promoting the plan. In many cases, a municipal government will agree to fulfil this role, although the main sponsor agency could be a native band council, conservation authority, service club, community foundation, major employer, or a neighbourhood ratepayers group (for a neighbourhood action plan).

If a municipal government is going to sponsor a Community Action Plan, it may want to pass a resolution supporting the project and allocate staff and financial resources to the project. The request should come from community representatives, with the backing of as many organizations and individuals as possible. Talk to your local councillors beforehand and make sure they will support the resolution.

When identifying resources for your Community Action Plan, be creative. The possibilities are endless. Below are some examples of different approaches to funding various elements of a CAP.

**Community coordinator:** The coordinator can be an existing staff person, a new position, a paid consultant, or a volunteer. Larger municipalities may be able to identify other resource people in support of the project, including a writer and publicity staff.

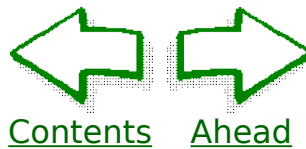
**Public workshops:** Public meetings can be covered by the municipality, or supported through corporate or foundation sponsorship and public donations, or sponsored by a local group.

**Printing and distribution:** The final action plan can be published and widely distributed as an official report, or it can be given limited distribution to the key community groups. It can be made available to the public free of charge, or at cost. Another innovative option is to print the action plan as an insert to the community newspaper. It provides the newspaper an opportunity to actively participate in the plan, reduces printing costs, and ensures widespread distribution.

In general, to develop and carry out a Community Action Plan, some type of support that is needed to for the following activities:

- designation of a coordinator for the project
- establishment or identification of a community coordinating committee
- community consultation efforts
- preparation of a draft action plan
- provision for public input into, comment on, and review of the draft action plan
- revision and approval of a final action plan
- publication/printing of the final document
- provision of ongoing support to the coordinating committee.

Funds for communities engaged in organizing themselves for action is available from the federal and provincial governments, District Health Councils, foundations, and companies. Grants can range from small (a few thousand dollars) to large (\$300,000 over three years), and each program funds different aspects of community action.



## 5. Going Public

### ..... Drafting a Community Action Plan

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This section is an introduction to a written Community Action Plan. It outlines the steps your coordinating committee can follow to prepare an action plan. They are:

- Adapt the process to the community
  - Solicit input from the community
  - Draft the Community Action Plan
  - Review and approve the Pan.
- 

#### **Step 1..... Adapt the Process to the Community**

Every community is different. The task of making an action plan fit the needs of the

community rests mainly with the Coordinating Committee. That is why ensuring that the committee is dedicated, well defined, and grounded in the community is so important. The initial public consultation event will serve to identify community concerns and priorities. Before the committee undertakes this event, they will need to ensure they are all comfortable with the CAP process. This aspect of CAP development should not be rushed. It is pivotal to the success of the program. As a first step, the Coordinating Committee should:

- review the background material (such as this discussion paper), existing municipal strategic plans, existing public consultation processes, and other environmental reports for the municipality;
- agree on the purpose and structure of the action plan
- review the initial list of community groups and identify a list of groups for each member of the committee to contact personally
- establish a work plan and timetable.

A solid, well-defined beginning will ensure a solid, well-defined Community Action Plan.

## **Step 2..... Solicit input from the community.**

In preparing an action plan for your area, it is essential to determine how you can reach each and every member of your community. Involving as many diverse community groups as possible will allow the plan to reach a large percentage of the population.

There are many ways to canvass community groups and the public for ideas that can become part of your action plan. Here are some suggestions:

- Issue a press release to announce the project, introduce the members of the coordinating committee, and request public involvement
- Advertise through local newspapers
- Contact local businesses to solicit their involvement. The local Chamber of Commerce can play a lead role in coordinating the involvement of the business community in the Action Plan. The Coordinating Committee can assist by matching businesses with appropriate community projects
- Contact key groups directly. Distribute a questionnaire to community groups to solicit their suggestions for community-based projects. (See box below)
- Host a public meeting. A public meeting allow provide the community with an opportunity to learn about Community Action Plans and to discuss their initial priorities.

### **A Community Questionnaire**

**Keep it simple. We suggest three questions:**

#### **1) What are the priority issues for our community?**

List the major issues you feel we need to address in our community. They will probably be local issues, but you can also include global, national and regional concerns.

#### **2) What can your group do to help?**

Give a short summary (one or two paragraphs) of any existing or planned projects, activities, or resources that will help to address the priority issues. For projects, include:

- a description of the project,
- the people and organizations involved,

- its status (e.g. planned, or third year of operation), and
- anticipated benefits

If possible, please attach a detailed description and work plan, including material, tools and equipment that will be needed and sources from which they can be obtained, the approvals required to initiate the project, and the funding requirements and sources of funds.

### **3) What support do you need?**

For each of the above activities, provide a summary of the support that would improve your ability to carry out your projects. Include any other suggestions you may have for support material and services that would help to improve your organization's ability to educate the public and involve them in environmental projects (e.g. training, educational material, equipment, expert advisors).

## **Step 3..... Draft the Community Action Plan**

Once the initial consultation has been completed and community groups and businesses have been contacted directly, the Coordinating Committee will need to meet on a more regular basis to prepare the Action Plan. There are five basic steps in this process:

### **a) Identify a community vision:**

Did one or two issues emerge as priorities for your plan? Draw from the results of public consultation, other existing reports on environmental issues, statements from the participating groups on their existing priorities, and any other relevant documents.

### **b) Assess each project:**

Review the projects and priorities submitted by the community groups. Assess each project's merits and select those that fall within the mandate of the CAP. Include proposed projects as well as existing ones. Include both short-term and long-term projects and activities in the plan. Short-term projects ensure immediate results whereas the long-term projects can lead to high profile and significant results

### **c) Develop partnerships in support of each project:**

For each project, identify the partners and their respective roles. The committee and the community coordinator should be prepared to contact individual groups with suggestions on how their project can be strengthened or supported through a partnership with another group. Although this process can be time consuming, it is essential to the integrity of the plan. Recognize that as the plan is implemented, partnerships may change.

### **d) Identify possible community-wide campaigns:**

For those issues where there is a large degree of support, the committee may wish to consider proposing a community-wide campaign within which the committee and/or other lead organizations would coordinate a series of community projects.

### **e) Prepare a draft plan:**

The project coordinator should compile all the information (e.g. community priorities, coordinating committee members, short-term and long-term projects, and potential community-wide campaigns) to create a draft of the action plan. The committee can then review the overall plan and suggest other activities that could be initiated by community groups. For example, your community may have several tree-planting projects on the go, and a "Pitch-In" campaign to pick up litter, but there may be no long-term care for a local greenspace. You can recommend that a group "adopt" the area, keep it clean and look after newly-planted trees.

Include also any recommendations the committee wishes to make for public or private sector support programs. For example, you may feel the community needs more expert advice and training on tree-planting. With identification of this need, the provincial forestry and environmental organizations, and the provincial and federal governments will be encouraged to develop improved support programs.

When the vision of the community has been developed into a strategy, with individual projects and goals, the committee should revisit the process of identifying funding needs and



resources. A more detailed action plan will help identify specifics for funding proposals and applicable programs. Use the following sample Table of Contents to identify essential elements of your Community Action Plan.

# Community Action Plan

## Suggested Table of Contents

**Cover Letter:** a letter to the community from the Mayor or community leader

**Introduction:** a description of the purpose of the Action Plan and how it was developed

**Community Profile:** a brief overview of the distinguishing characteristics of the municipality and the priority issues

### The Action Plan:

- a description of the issues and community goals
- lead organizations from each sector
- current activities and projects
- suggestions for new projects or a community-wide campaign

### Resources:

- where to go for financial support
- where to get advice and educational material
- where to get donated products or services

**Network:** a contact list of key groups, government departments and others who are supporting the Community Action Plan

## Step 4..... Review and Approve the Plan

Once the committee is satisfied with the draft plan, it will need to undergo public review. Distribute the draft to your community group network, the participating businesses, and the local government in advance of a public meeting.

The review will identify any weaknesses, and help to solidify public support for the plan. The comments received can be reviewed by the committee before the final version is prepared. The coordinating committee and each of the sponsoring organizations should approve the final version before it is printed.



# 6. Implementation

## ..... Community Campaigns and Individual Projects

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By this stage, you will have an overall Community Action Plan, lead organizations for each issue, and a network of community groups that are interested in participating in the plan and its projects. Transforming the plan into action is the next step. Below are some suggestions on how to go about implementation by:

- Supporting individual projects
  - Deciding on a project
  - Initiating special campaigns.
- 

### Step 1..... Supporting individual projects

There is no shortage of ideas and energy within a community. However, there may be difficulties to overcome before a good idea is turned into a successful project. With a little help from the Coordinating Committee and other members of the community network, local groups can develop projects that will implement elements of the overall action plan. Creating partnerships allows diverse groups to contribute different skills and resources to a common project.

Here's where the Coordinating Committee can help:

- review and strengthen individual project ideas
- find partnerships within the community (other groups that are doing related activities)
- research funding, in-kind donations, and technical support within the community
- maintain an up-to-date list of the support programs (financial and otherwise) that are available from the provincial and federal governments and agencies, non-government organizations, corporations, and foundations
- write letters of support for key projects that have been reviewed and approved by the Coordinating Committee
- help promote projects through a media strategy
- initiate a volunteer program to support CAP projects.

### Step 2..... Deciding on a Project:

#### Advice to Community Groups

Even the smallest of groups is important to a Community Action Plan. The goal is to reach as many people as possible, and every school class, neighbourhood group, local business, and cultural and social group can play a role.

If your group is interested in taking on a larger project, take a moment to review your collective strengths. Try to design a project that will build on your existing skills and resources.

#### Assess Your Strengths

- i) What are the interests of your members?
- ii) What is your total membership?
- iii) How many people can you expect to attract to an event? How many people can you reach through educational activities?
- iv) What are your areas of expertise (as individuals and as a group)? What special skills do your members have? What experience does your group have?

v) What resources do you have? Do you have an operating budget that will cover basic project costs? Are there people who have donated goods and services in the past and who are likely to continue doing so?

vi) How can your group best support a Community Action Plan?

- By taking a lead role in establishing an action plan for your community?
- By participating in public workshops?
- By being a lead organization on one issue?
- By developing a special project?
- By contributing to a project or a community-wide campaign?

## Assess Your Project

Do you have a project that you think is appropriate for the CAP? Use these questions to help refine it.

i) Is it achievable? Have you set realistic goals for your project?

ii) Does it support a community goal? Are there other organizations with similar or supporting projects?

iii) What are the barriers? Can you think of anything that would present a significant problem?

iv) Who are your friends? Who will assist your project, either financially, through in-kind donations, or with moral support?

## Sample Project Ideas

*There are many types of projects community groups and schools can organize. Here are some ideas that can be adapted to almost any issue or Community Action goal:*

### Research

- an inventory of the local natural environment
- sampling and testing (soil, water, air quality)
- community mapping to indicate environmentally sensitive areas, or toxic hot spots;
- research papers on specific issues
- community surveys or a "needs assessment" (what do people want to see, what do they need to know?)

### Education and Awareness

- door-to-door campaigns / farm to farm / individual contact campaigns
- landowner contact programs
- home audits (for toxics, solid waste, energy and water conservation, etc.)
- local business education campaigns
- development of general and target specific educational material
- public displays

### Hands-on Projects

- adopt an area (stream, woodlot, marsh, street, or urban park) with a look at all aspects of its management and enhancement
- tree-planting
- stream clean-up and rehabilitation
- renaturalization (creating wetlands, urban parks, arboretums etc.)
- litter clean-up
- recycling or composting
- toxic waste collection (with appropriate government approval and participation)
- community gardens
- neighbourhood, or community challenges (for transit, saving energy, reducing garbage, etc.)

### Government Interaction

- communicate your priorities to your elected officials
- learn about and participate in government planning
- facilitate public involvement in public consultation exercise (Official Plan)

- presentations to schools
- self-education programs for your group on specific issues
- information network (establish a network of community experts)
- an information hot-line
- special media events (launches, community days, project results)
- information fairs or parties

reviews, environmental assessments, etc.)

- develop a checklist, or sponsor an "environmental priorities" questionnaire during municipal elections

### Step 3..... Initiating Special Campaigns

Here's where things really begin to happen! A community campaign brings all the interested groups in the community network together to tackle one common goal. Each organization designs and carries out its own project consistent with its interests, expertise, and resources. The Coordinating Committee can announce a special campaign for any one of the issues identified in the Community Action Plan. Over the next year, the committee can coordinate a series of projects to achieve the campaign target.

There are three main objectives for a community campaign. These are:

- 1) achieve measurable results in environmental enhancement and/or resource conservation;
- 2) promote environmentally-responsible behaviour and attitudes;
- 3) promote widespread public involvement in community projects.

The campaign will vary depending on the size of the community and the complexity of the issue. For example, smaller communities can reach every citizen more easily than larger municipalities. In addition, some issues lend themselves more easily to community based projects and activities.

Try to select a campaign and a goal that are both challenging and have a high chance for success. Here are some possibilities:



- 100% of homes with composters
- a 10% reduction in home energy consumption
- a 20% increase in commuter cycling
- a 10% increase in natural areas
- the complete restoration of a degraded stream
- a 10% reduction in household hazardous waste
- a green economy initiative (such as eco-tourism, or small business ventures).

Any of these campaigns will require careful planning and the complete support of all sectors of the community. These are some of the steps involved in undertaking a community campaign:

**1. Identify the Campaign Target.**

The Coordinating Committee should agree on the focus and objectives for a community campaign and draft an initial outline of the projects and activities that could be developed under the campaign.

**2. Bring together the key players.**

Coordinate the organizations, government departments, businesses, and others that can take a lead role in developing, supporting and implementing the campaign.

**3. Hold regular planning meetings.**

At the first meeting, participants should outline the resources they can bring to the campaign and ideas for projects. Try to find a lead organization for each component of the campaign, and a short list of other groups that can be involved as partners. For example, the local utility could develop a home energy conservation kit that, in turn, will be used by community groups in a homeowner contact program, at shopping mall displays, or given away at a community conference on "How to Save on your Energy Bill!"

**4. Assist each organization to prepare their project.**

Members of the Coordinating Committee, and other participants in the campaign, should help community groups find the financial, technical and material support they need to get their project off the ground. Try to establish new partnerships within the community: partner community groups with local businesses, corporations, funders, or provincial and federal support. Use the community network to develop a list of groups and volunteers who will help with the campaign.

**5. Develop the overall campaign.**

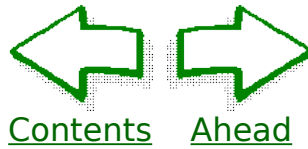
Here's a checklist of things to look for in a good campaign:

- a clear purpose
- strong prospects for success
- strong partnerships
- large-scale community awareness and involvement
- a broad range of activities.

A good campaign will achieve its targets through several different approaches, including, but not limited to:

- an effective media strategy
- local displays
- local government programs
- community events (workshops, displays and special activities)
- one-on-one contact (door-to-door, farm-to-farm, workshops, staffed displays, etc.)
- community group presentations and membership education.

**We cannot understate the importance of involving as many community groups as possible in the campaign.** Most people belong to at least one group, whether through work, home, or community. The community group network provides an unequalled opportunity to reach the entire community through personal contact.



## 7. Review:

### ..... Improving Your Action Plan

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The Coordinating Committee's remaining tasks are: to evaluate the success of the Community Action Plan, find new partners, recommend additional activities that would further promote environmental stewardship, and revise the Action Plan as required. The two requirements are:

- Monitor and evaluate the Plan's success.
  - Revise the plan as required every few years.
- 

#### **Step 1..... Monitor and Evaluate the Plan's Success**

The coordinating committee should review the community's progress as necessary in order to identify new areas in need of special attention. Refer back to the characteristics, goals, and objectives of a CAP listed in the "What is a Community Action Plan" section.

If you held a community campaign, hold a workshop at the end to review the results. If you ran into problems, or you discovered limits to what can be achieved through voluntary action, use the workshop as an opportunity to develop recommendations for government, corporate, non-governmental, and individual actions that would make it easier for people to contribute to a healthier environment.

Highlight your successes. The Coordinating Committee or municipality can give out annual awards to groups, businesses, and individuals who have played a key role in implementing a project under the Action Plan, and to those projects that are particularly successful.



## **Step 2..... Review and Revise the Plan as Required**

Every two years or so, the Action Plan should be revised in order to keep it current. The first revision can be a streamlined version of the CAP process, asking each group to update their activities. The streamlined revision can be accomplished in two to three months. There are several reasons to revisit your CAP on a regular basis:

As your community moves ahead with its CAP activities, its priorities will change. In addressing one issue, another may become apparent.

Government policies or programs may change, or new information may become available, requiring your community to address other issues, or use different approaches.

New programs may be developed in the private sector which will affect your community's priorities.

In expending effort in specific projects, it is easy to lose sight of overall goals and strategies. As you move toward your goals, you may discover more effective approaches which will need to be reflected in the CAP.

For many issues, achieving measurable differences in habits and perceptions will require reinforcing the long-term commitment of CAP participants.

Plan to hold additional public workshops every four or five years in order to conduct a thorough assessment of the plan and identify any new priorities.

## **Step 3..... Keep In Touch**

The *Green*ONTARIO internet site will endeavour to keep an up-to-date list of community coordinators across the province. If your community has an environmental coordinator, coordinating committee, or any community-wide environmental initiative, [let us know](#). We'll include a listing in our directory of community contacts.



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